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SUBJECT Interview with William Colby

Iran-contra

BRYANT GUMBEL: On "Close-Up" this morning, Oliver North and the CIA. This week Lt. Colonel Oliver North has testified that Bill Casey, the late Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was in on all elements of the Iran-contra affair from the start. In fact, North claims, Casey was the brains of the operation, the man who oversaw the operation and lied to Congress to protect it.

William Colby was a close friend of Bill Casey's. He was a veteran of many covert operations and a former Director of the CIA. Mr. Colby joins us this morning from Washington.

Good morning, Mr. Colby.

WILLIAM COLBY: Good morning, Mr. Gumbel.

GUMBEL: First off, sir, how believable do you think Colonel North has been before the committee?

COLBY: I think he's been quite believable in his statements in the committee. I think he's well aware of the danger of a perjury charge.

GUMBEL: Do you have any reason to dispute Colonel North's assertion that Bill Casey knew about the diversion from the start, applauded it and did his best to hide it from Congress?

COLBY: Well, all I know is what I read in the papers and in the testimony. But the answer to that is I think Bill Casey had satisfied himself that the Boland Amendment did not apply to the NSC. That's a close legal question as to whether it

-2-

should or should not. And there's been testimony both directions on it, but I think Bill Casey, running the CIA, was aware that the CIA was barred from assistance to the contras and looked around for another way to skin a cat. And he slipped over the edge.

GUMBEL: You're a man familiar with the law, familiar with the NSC, familiar with the CIA. Do you think it violated the Boland Amendment?

COLBY: I think it certainly violated the intent of Congress. But remember, this was the Intelligence Committee that put this out and it referred to agencies engaged in intelligence activities, which one would normally think of as the intelligence community and not the NSC. The NSC normally is an advisory body to the President.

GUMBEL: Let me go back to Colonel North and the CIA, if I might. North said that since Bill Casey knew all about the diversion that he assumed that he had shared that with President Reagan.

Do you think that a good assumption?

COLBY: Yes, I do. I think a lieutenant colonel, faced with people at the general rank and cabinet level rank, and if he's telling them what he's doing, he assumes that they are checking it out with their bosses.

GUMBEL: You knew Bill Casey very well. You knew how personally close he was to Ronald Reagan. What's the likelihood, sir, that he would have kept something like this from his close friend and his boss?

COLBY: I think he would have covered it in very general terms. Here we have a question of the President's management style, as the Tower Commission euphemistically referred to it. But if you have a President with a loose management style, then he needs a very strong chief of staff to make sure that the machinery behaves itself and does what he wants it to. And in that case, I think the Tower Commission criticism of Donald Regan was very much on point.

GUMBEL: Let me make sure I get this right. You do think, then, that Mr. Casey would have covered it with the President?

COLBY: I think he probably would have indicated that he was doing all he possibly could to help the contras. Whether he went into detail as to where \$50 here or \$75 there came from, I'm not sure. But the fact that the President was meeting people and

-3-

thanking them for their support to the contras I think puts it pretty clearly that he was aware that there was a lot going on in support of the contras.

GUMBEL: I'm not trying to pin you down. I'm just trying to make sure we're certain on this.

COLBY: No, that's all right.

GUMBEL: How detailed would he have gotten? Would he have told him particularly about the diversion?

COLBY: Not necessarily. It's hard to say. I think he would have said that they were collecting money from various places, to include foreign countries, to include the Iranians, to include the private citizens of the United States. Now as to whether he went into detail on any one of those in view of the President's disinclination to get into detail, I'm not sure. I don't think we can say that.

GUMBEL: But you would think that he would have taken it up in more detail with his chief of staff than Donald Regan.

COLBY: He certainly should have, except that Bill Casey had a direct relationship with the President. And in that sense, if Donald Regan had not insisted upon knowing what was going on, then it's Donald Regan's fault.

GUMBEL: You were head of the CIA for three years, worked in the agency for many years. How difficult would it have been to carry out a massive operation of the type we're seeing here without other senior officials throughout the CIA knowing?

COLBY: Well, in this case, with the CIA barred from being in it -- and the fact is that you can find a few fingerprints from the CIA on the wrong side of the line, passing a message from Colonel North, and things like that -- but, in general, the CIA was left out of this. Now the CIA similarly was very slightly involved in Watergate, but essentially stayed out of it because it wasn't any of its business, and it carefully stayed out of things that weren't its business.

GUMBEL: Colonel North has told the committee that he has nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to apologize for. Would you quibble with that?

COLBY: I certainly would, yes. I think it's the obligation of any officer to make sure that what he's doing is lawful and proper. I think that the Colonel, very properly, reacted. He's a Marine; he reacted to what he conceived of as proper authority. But I think it's pretty obvious that the law

-4-

has been changed, that you don't conduct covert actions without letting the Congress know about it through the constituted committees.

So it's not so much the Boland Amendment problem; it's the evasion of the basic law that requires consultation with the Congress.

GUMBEL: One final note, sir. Do you think Bill Casey, the late Bill Casey, is being positioned to replace Ollie North as the fall guy of this entire operation?

COLBY: No, I think the things are coming out that bring a full picture of what went on. And it sounds really quite natural what went on. You had a group of very zealous people in the -- around the President who wanted to accomplish what the President wanted to accomplish. And they slipped over the edge in the process of doing that.

GUMBEL: Mr. William Colby, thank you very much for being with us, sir.

COLBY: Thank you.

GUMBEL: And I wish you a very good weekend.